

CRITICAL READING ON THE SAT/PSAT

skills and suggestions for improvement*

Understanding main ideas in a reading passage

How to improve: Read the whole passage carefully and try to determine the author's overall message. Practice making distinctions between the main idea and supporting details.

Understanding tone

How to improve: When reading, consider how an author's choice of words helps define his or her attitudes. Pay attention to the way in which tone conveys meaning in conversation and in the media.

Recognizing the purpose of various writing strategies

How to improve: Writers use a variety of tools to achieve their effects. While you read, look for such things as specific examples, quotations, striking images, and emotionally loaded words. Think about the connotations of specific words and why the author might have decided to use them.

Understanding the use of examples

How to improve: Authors often include examples in their writing to communicate and support their ideas. Read different kinds of argumentative writing (editorials, criticism, personal essays) and pay attention to the way examples are used. State the point of the examples in your own words. Use examples in your own writing.

Applying ideas presented in a reading passage

How to improve: When you read, try to determine the author's ideas and assumptions and then think about how they might apply to new situations.

Determining an author's purpose or perspective

How to improve: Authors write for a variety of purposes, such as to inform, to explain, or to convince. When you read, try to determine why the author wrote what he or she wrote.

Making connections between information in different parts of a passage

How to improve: Work on figuring out the relationship between the material presented in one part of a reading passage and material presented in another part. Ask yourself, for example, how facts presented in the beginning of a magazine article relate to the conclusion.

Comparing and contrasting ideas presented in two passages

How to improve: Read editorials that take opposing views on an issue. Look for differences and similarities in tone, point of view, and main idea.

Distinguishing conflicting viewpoints

How to improve: When reading, practice summarizing main ideas and noting sentences

- "How to improve" taken from the college board website link to Maine standards alignment at http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/counselors/psat/Maine.pdf

that mark transition points. Learn to understand methods of persuasion and argumentation. Expand your reading to include argumentative writing, such as political commentary, philosophy, and criticism.

Being thorough

How to improve: Don't just pick the first answer choice you see that looks tempting. Be sure to evaluate all the choices before you select your answer, just as you would read an entire paragraph rather than assume its meaning based only on the first sentence.

Understanding difficult vocabulary

How to improve: Broaden your reading to include newspapers and magazines, as well as fiction and nonfiction from before the 1900s. Include reading material that is a bit outside your comfort zone. Improve your knowledge of word roots to help determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Understanding how negative words, suffixes, and prefixes affect sentences

How to improve: When reading, pay attention to the ways in which authors use negation. Look at how negative words (like “not” and “never”), prefixes (like “un” and “im”), and suffixes (like “less”) affect the meaning of words and sentences.

Recognizing a definition when it is presented in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how such elements as appositives, subordination, and punctuation are used to define words in a sentence.

Understanding and using a word in an unusual context

How to improve: Work on using word definitions when choosing an answer. Try not to be confused by an unusual meaning of a term.

Understanding complex sentences

How to improve: Ask your English teacher to recommend books that are a bit more challenging than those you're used to reading. Practice breaking down the sentences into their component parts to improve your comprehension. Learn how dependent clauses and verb phrases function in sentences.

Recognizing connections between ideas in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how connecting words (such as relative pronouns and conjunctions) establish the relationship between different parts of a sentence.

Recognizing words that signal contrasting ideas in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how certain words (such as “although,” “but,” “however,” and “while”) are used to signal a contrast between one part of a sentence and another.

Understanding sentences that deal with abstract ideas

How to improve: Broaden your reading to include newspaper editorials, political essays, and philosophical writings.

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Comprehending long sentences

How to improve: Practice reducing long sentences into small, understandable parts.

Choosing a correct answer based on the meaning of the entire sentence

How to improve: Make sure your answer choice fits the logic of the sentence as a whole. Don't choose an answer just because it sounds good when inserted in the blank.

Understanding sentences that deal with scientific ideas.

How to improve: Read magazine articles about scientific subjects to improve your comfort level in this area.

<http://www.literacyforme.org/Element3.html> This is the link to reading strategies related from the Universal Elements website.

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